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An
Inaugural Dissertation
on
Anasarca,

by Charles Urquhart
~~Charles Urquhart~~
of
Virginia.

admitted March 10. 1819.

Before entering
Dissertation,
Dropsy takes
the various forms
Human Life
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of Anasarca

Before entering, fully upon the subject of this Dissertation, I shall premise a few observations on Dropsy taken in a general sense, & enumerate some of the various forms & appearances, which it assumes in the human System. Dropsy has engaged the attention of the Physician ever since the dawn of Medical Science, and numerous are the opinions which have been advanced by Authors respecting its Phenomena and its Cure. Without searching after the old & exploded doctrines of the ancient writers on this Subject, I shall only advert to those, whose opinions are of modern date; & whose doctrines are canvassed & examined by the medical Literati in this enlightened State of our Science.

Barwin, an ingenious but speculative writer, attributes the Disease in question to a retrograde action of the absorbent vessels, supposing that the vessels with which they are supplied, become paralytic, and did not close sufficiently to prevent the reabsorption of their contents.

Sydenham, whose opinions generally conform to the doc-

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-lines of this Humoral Pathology, entertained the Ideas that Dropsy was produced by weakness of the Blood, which debility, was owing to an immoderate depletion from the Blood vessels, to chronic diseases of long standing, and to the intemperate use of intoxicating Liquors.

The celebrated Cullen, supposed, that Dropsy is the effect of increased effusion or diminished absorption, or in other words, a disturbance of that Balance in the human System, which is necessary to preserve it in a healthy & vigorous state.

Others have thought, that Dropsy is owing to an inability, or want of due energy in the Kidneys to secrete the urine.

This conclusion was drawn, from the circumstances, that there is a paucity of urine in this Disease. As I am not prepared or competent to advance any Speculations on the Theory of this Disease, which would be interesting, or which could lead to any useful practical results, I shall proceed to the consideration of its Symptoms & Cause. Dropsy is defined, "a preternatural collection of Serous, or watery fluids in the different parts or cavities of the Body." It assumes various names, from the different parts of the Body, which fall under its

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banquet Influence: viz, an effusion in the cavity of the
Chest, is termed Hydrothorax; in the Brains Hydrocephalus,
in the abdomen, & Scrotis, in the Scrotum, Hydrocele &c.
The Species of Dropsy which is the Subject of the present
essay, is that denominated Anasarca: It is a soft
inelastic Swelling of the whole Body or some part of it. The
Seat of this affection is the cellular membrane. It at first
commonly appears in particular parts only, but at ^{length} frequently
extends throughout the whole. In every Stage of its progress,
the Swelling is uniform; at first always soft, and reced-
ing upon pressure by the Finger, which forms a pit, that
remains for some little time after the pressure is removed,
but at length rises to its former fulness. It generally makes
its first appearance on the lower extremities, and in the last
Stage, scarcely to be discovered in the evening. It is usually
increased by an erect posture, but some cases have occur-
ed, when it was removed by the exercise of walking.
The Intumescence, which as I have said above first affects
the lower extremities, at length extends its course upwards, and
gradually spreads, untill it has taken possession of the whole

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system. *Proximate cause.* The proximate cause of Anasarca is a preternatural collection of Serum or watery fluid in the cellular membranes of the Body. It sometimes spreads the Skin itself, & exudes in drops through its pores, or being too viscid to pass through these, it appears in small vesicles on the cuticle. The existence of any other species of Dropsy, arising from causes affecting the system generally, for a great length of time, is commonly associated with Anasarca.

Symptoms. Anasarca is marked by scarcity of urine, the small quantity evacuated being of a high color, and depositing a copious sediment. It is also attended by a great Degree of thirst. In the advanced stage of the disease, the Breathing is Short & Laborious, owing to the pressure of the accumulated fluid on the Diaphragm. This last symptom is spoken of by Sydenham in his treatise on Dropsy.

The State of the Pulse in Anasarca is so little changed from the healthy Standard, that it seems seldom to attract the notice of Practitioners. The late celebrated Dr Rush, who was a strict observer of the pulse in all Diseases, mentions, in the 2nd Vol. of his Medical Inquiries & Observations,

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effusions should at the same time be made on the
This remedy, strictly in accordance with the doctrine of
by corresponding in other diseases. In general, however,
Physicians, from the use of liquids was injured in
this disease, & they consequently prohibited them in all cases.
Among this number was the celebrated Boerhaave, who has
handed down to posterity many useful practical precepts
in the science of medicine. But the old maxim, *Humana
vita est approximabile Veri*, & that this maxim is the
basis of all medicine, was actually used in his time in the disease
is amply proved by the success of the opposite mode of treatment.
To give an Outline from subscribing to this opinion, that he
thought that the use of Liquids sometimes cures the disease.
In his time, as is concerned Prostitution, & in many
other diseases, the strict abstinence & abstinence of
Liquids ad Libitum. I am now to speak of the
moderns, who have concluded that it is
the cause of this disease, & that the use of
Liquids is the cure. The fact, says Boerhaave, is not
to the fact. This is sufficiently proved by the

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of the daily friction. The action of the absorbents is also increased, which tend to remove the accumulated fluid.

Rollers of Flannel should be applied on the whole length of the anasarcaous Limb, & should also be bound to the Belly when it is much swollen. Friction with the hand or a flesh Brush as recommended by many authors of Astenation, will be found serviceable. The utility of Exercise in the removal of Anasarca accompanied with Debility is asserted by Dr Rush, & is certainly entitled to the attention of the Physicians. I ought not to omit to mention the great Benefit derived by Peppor Chapman from the use of the Flannel Roller. In a case which fell under his care at the Almshouse, he used the Roller (after Mortification had taken place in the Limb) with the most beneficial results. Notwithstanding the administration of the Long List of Remedies which the Materia Medica affords, the Disease frequently discovers an obstinate & unrelenting character, & baffles the utmost Skill of the Practitioner. In cases of this nature, when the extremities are much swollen with the accumulated fluid, it has been the

practise of Tonsils, to puncture the Skin & cellular membrane
& make artificial openings for the escape of the fluid.

Others have also been used for the purpose of stimulating
the part to new energy, & of restoring its functions. Nothing,
I think can be more temerarious than this course. The
parts are in a debilitated State, and have a disposition
to Gangrene, which should be guarded against by
all the efforts of the Practitioner. In many cases, I
have no doubt, Death has been accelerated by the per-
-suance of the above plan of treatment. As long as the
Patient has sufficient Strength to bear the impression
of medicines, I should not despair of effecting a cure.
The Lamp of Life may faintly glimmer for a while, and
appear to our view almost extinguished, but by the great
restorative powers of nature, & the resources which the medi-
-cal art affords, it may again be Stimulated into action,
and shine with renovated Splendor. — — —

of the same kind as the one I have seen in the
Museum of the Academy of Sciences in Paris.
It is a small, round, black, and very hard
stone, which is found in the same place
as the other stones of the same kind.
It is of the same size and shape as the
other stones of the same kind.
It is of the same color and texture as the
other stones of the same kind.
It is of the same weight and measure as the
other stones of the same kind.
It is of the same value and price as the
other stones of the same kind.